IDEAS

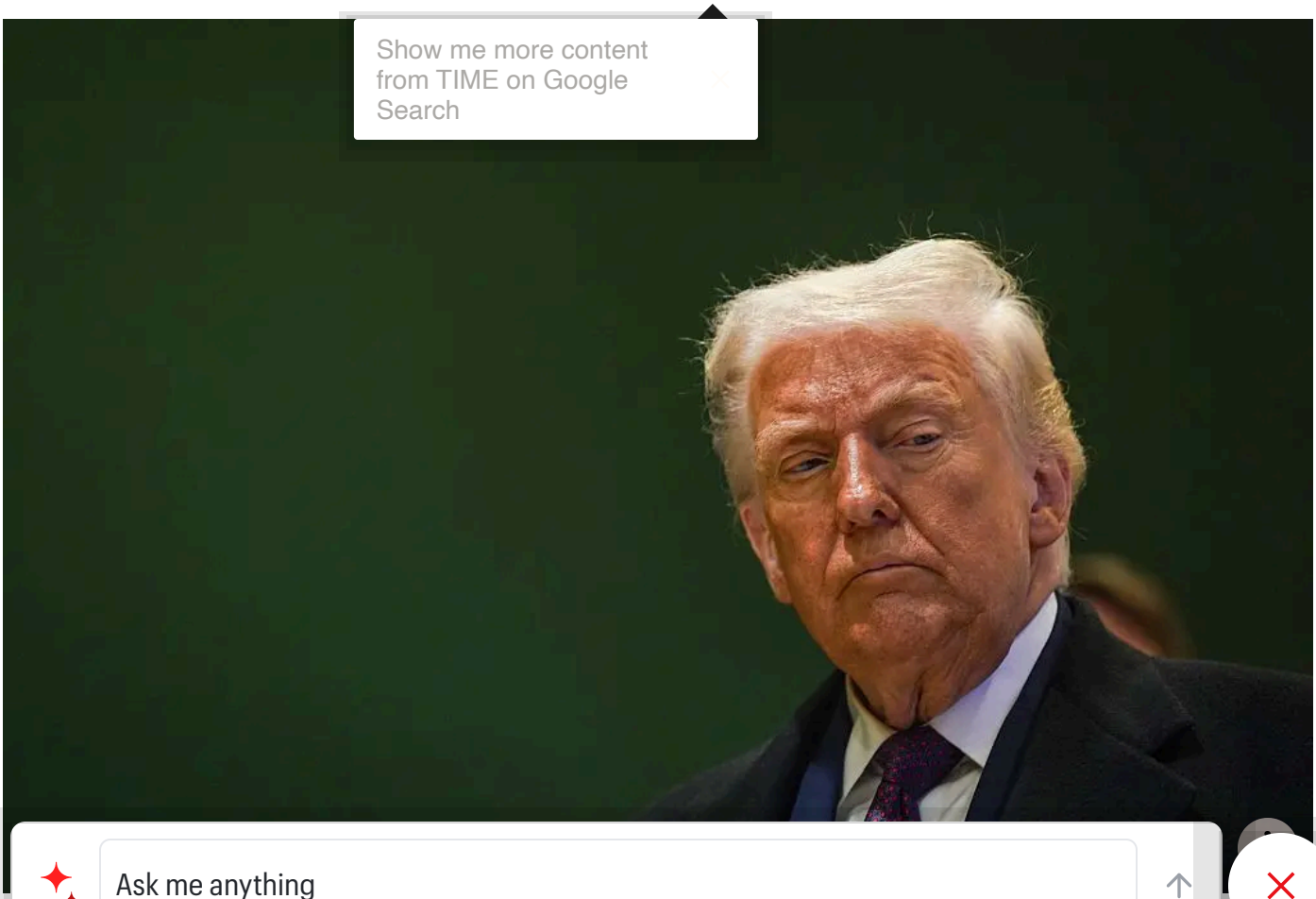
JAN 24, 2026 6:00 AM ET

Trump's Exit From the World Health Organization Is Dangerous

IDEAS HEALTH

ADD TIME ON GOOGLE

Show me more content from TIME on Google Search



Ask me anything

by Tyler Evans

habit of compounding quietly, long before anyone realizes it is too late.

I have worked at the intersection of clinical care, public health, and humanitarian response, including in settings where global coordination made the difference between containing an outbreak and watching it spiral out of control. In those environments, sharing information about emerging diseases is not theoretical. It is a practical tool that determines how quickly threats are recognized and whether lives are protected or lost.

Trending Shorts

Former CDC officials say we're "not prepared" for the...

RFK Jr. is S Trump's He

Sponsored

Ask me anything

Viruses do not respect borders. Drug-resistant bacteria do not wait for diplomatic alignment. The idea that a nation can insulate itself from global health threats by disengaging from global coordination misunderstands how disease spreads and how prevention works. For

The WHO also plays a concrete role in supporting U.S. economic interests. By helping create a more stable global health environment, it reduces the risk of disruptions that ripple through trade and supply chains. Its prequalification and standard-setting processes help American medical innovations reach global markets more efficiently, while coordinated procurement drives demand for U.S. health products abroad. Continued U.S. engagement helps ensure that global health standards reflect scientific rigor and transparency, allowing American companies to remain competitive and credible. These investments are tangible. They translate into jobs, economic stability, and a healthier global workforce that supports long-term growth at home.

Advertisement

Global health security is not something nations can opt into selectively. Surveillance systems only work when countries both contribute data and remain embedded in the institutions that interpret and act on it. Influence, access, and early warning are not automatic. They are the product of sustained engagement. When the United States steps away, it forfeits visibility, leverage, and the ability to shape how global health threats are identified and addressed.

To be sure, the WHO, like any organization, is far from perfect. Its failures during COVID-19 are well-documented and deserve scrutiny. But disengagement is not reform. Walking away does not fix what is broken. It leaves the system intact while surrendering one of the few positions capable of driving meaningful change. For decades, the United States used its seat at the table to push standards, demand transparency, and shape global response. Outside the system, that influence simply vanishes.

Advertisement

The consequences are not theoretical. A weaker WHO means slower outbreak detection, f n, a

Ask me anything

pressures are already testing domestic health systems nationwide. The assumption that the United States can replace these functions on its own ignores the basic reality that no nation can generate global surveillance, verification, and coordinated early warning in isolation.

Unlike the President's antagonistic view of the world, public health is not competitive. It is collaborative and collective. Stronger systems abroad make people safer at home. Disease surveillance in one region improves preparedness everywhere. Shared standards reduce chaos when emergencies strike. The WHO, flawed as it is, exists to hold those functions together.

Advertisement

What is often overlooked is who pays first. When global coordination erodes, the earliest impacts fall on populations with the least resilience, including children who miss vaccinations, communities without surveillance infrastructure, and health systems stretched beyond capacity. These early failures are not only humanitarian losses. They are the very risks decades of U.S. investment in global health were designed to prevent. Those failures do not remain contained. They spill outward, crossing borders and timelines until they become everyone's problem, including ours.

The painful irony is this: the WHO has saved millions of lives. For decades, investments in global health have delivered some of the highest returns of any public spending by preventing crises from reaching U.S. shores or reducing their severity when they do. That return does not disappear when funding is withdrawn. The protection does.

Advertisement

Public health failures rarely announce themselves in advance. They emerge slowly and invisibly, until early warning is lost and the only remaining signal is crisis. Leaving the World Health Organization increases the odds that the next failure will arrive sooner, spread faster, and cost more lives than it should.

That is a risk the country does not need to accept, especially when the costs of getting it

Ask me anything

Must-Reads from TIME

The Century of History Shaping the Debate Over GLP-1s

Health Panelists Talk Vaccines, Weight Loss, and the Importance of Respectful Discussion

2025 Has Been a Year of Unraveling Progress in Health

READ MORE

Sections

Home

Climate

Politics

Ideas

Health

Entertainment

AI

Sports

Ask me anything

Science

About Us

Your Subscriptions

Ask me anything

Ask me anything